

WHO AM I TRYING TO REACH?

(Research: Executive Summary)

Research played a critical role in enriching the development of the *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* initiative. A variety of secondary and primary research was conducted to gain a greater understanding of messages that could encourage the adoption of environmentally conscious choices by individuals, communities, and organizations.

Table 1 provides a summary of key research conducted to support the development of the initiative. Each section, including Review of Existing Research, Initiative Design/Exploratory Research, Concept- and Message-Testing Research, and Program Development Research is described in greater detail in Tab M of the toolkit.

Review of Existing Research	Primary Research		
	Initiative Design/Exploratory	Concept and Message Testing Research	Program Development Research
<NARC Review of Existing Transportation and Air Quality Public Education Programs (1995) <Target Audience Research: Roper Organization, Inc., Mediamark Research, Inc., Index, Pennsylvania DOT, and Washington Metropolitan Council of Governments	< Stakeholder Discussion Groups* (1996) < Target Audience Focus Groups** (1996) < Latino Focus Groups (1998)	< Concept Testing with Target Audience (1997) < Message Testing with Target Audience (1997)	<Initiative Pilot Phase (1998) <Initiative Demonstration Phase (May 1999 - October 2000)

* Discussion groups are structured discussions led by a moderator and typically include seven to nine people. The group convenes for 90 minutes to two hours, covering three to four topics in depth. (In all studies of this kind, results reflect the opinions and attitudes of a limited number of people, and therefore, should be regarded as suggestive rather than definitive. This research is not intended to be quantitative or to provide a probability sample of the population from which participants are selected.)

** Focus groups are structured discussions led by a moderator and typically include eight to 10 people. The group convenes for two hours, usually after work on a weekday. Typically two 2-hour groups are held per evening. The moderator leads the group through a discussion about their knowledge, awareness, attitudes, perceptions, and responses about a particular issue, product, or idea. Focus group participants should be recruited by reputable field services using a screener designed in collaboration with you. Typically, participants were offered small cash incentive for their participation. Each set of focus groups conducted for this project contained a mix of men and women, who varied considerably in terms of age, occupation, income level; minority representation was 10-20%, which reflected our target audience. (In all studies of this kind, results reflect the opinions and attitudes of a limited number of people, and therefore should be regarded as suggestive rather than definitive. This research is not intended to be quantitative or to provide a probability sample of the population from which participants are selected.)

Developing consumer-based messages that were relevant and motivated the public to take action was a critical aspect of the national initiative and imperative to the development of a successful community-based program. It was vital that the overarching message themes resonated across communities that varied greatly in availability of transportation options and air quality awareness levels, which led to the development of a full spectrum of components communities could tailor to fit their requirements. But, the major challenge was to identify an overarching theme that would motivate Americans to change their driving habits.

Marketing efforts generally are designed to appeal to specific target audiences because people respond best to messages created exclusively for them. The creative materials for *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* were developed to appeal to a broad group of drivers, as well as secondary audiences, while maintaining the major, overarching themes of the campaign.

The creative materials were designed for application anywhere and have been approved in towns from the U.S. to Australia. They work well in areas where there is an awareness of air quality problems or congestion; they also work well to generate awareness where it is lacking. The elements of the campaign are varied and some have universal applications that work in attainment and non-attainment areas.

Some of the messages, particularly those related to alternate modes of transportation, may be better suited to urban environments; however, it is important to understand that all of the messages created to support the themes of *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* are global in application. While some of the messages may not apply literally to each community or individual, they support the universal theme that individuals' choices regarding automotive usage can make a difference in air quality and congestion.

Key Findings

- **Key target audience.** The target audience for *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* public education models is “members of the general driving public,” and secondarily, those for whom environmental benefits would weigh into their transportation choices. The secondary audience is primarily college-educated and middle class. A review of existing research found that transportation and air quality programs were disseminating inconsistent messages. Participants in the *It All Adds Up* focus groups said they related to traffic congestion relief and other quality-of-life issues, such as time savings and stress relief, so those are the issues we decided to focus on. Concept and message testing with focus groups was critical in defining the initiative’s target audience and in helping to identify messages that would resonate with them.
- **Main topics of focus.** Findings from formative research with key organizations and members of the general driving public led to a positive message strategy that encourages voluntary actions, specifically trip chaining, regular car maintenance, and use of alternative modes of transportation. These three areas were chosen because they are supportive of existing efforts, significant in addressing the challenge of reducing traffic congestion and air pollution. (Ad Council research and experience over the past 59 years has shown that, to increase awareness, change attitudes, and influence behavior, it is much more effective to promote convenient, effective, and simple actions that individuals are likely to take, rather than large changes that few will take.)
- **“Congratulatory” tone for materials.** Focus group participants expressed resentment towards campaign messages that used an “accusatory” tone implying they were personally responsible for the ailing environment or for its renewal. This sample of the general driving public was not motivated to change their driving habits to improve air quality and traffic congestion and an accusatory tone made them even less willing to acknowledge their part. They responded best to messages that used a positive tone and congratulated people for actions they were already taking (even if not motivated by air quality)—instead of criticizing them for not doing more. Known as the “anthem” approach, this concept

uses rich visuals to convey a “bandwagon” feeling that highlights and reinforces positive behaviors, and gently calls the public to action in a non-threatening, non-prescriptive manner. Its tone is especially appropriate after the events of September 11, 2001.

- **Environment as secondary issue.** Most focus group participants did not see environmental benefits as a convincing reason to change their behavior; other more relevant benefits or competing issues held greater sway. Time savings and convenience topped the list of motivating factors, with most people unlikely to consider trip chaining, for example, purely for environmental reasons. And while participants often knew how they were contributing to poor air quality, few indicated a willingness to change, even when they could see a connection to health problems of family or friends. Therefore, those who consider a better environment a major reason for altering their transportation choices became a secondary target audience.
- **Coalitions critical to community efforts.** Coalitions extend the reach and effectiveness of public education efforts. By calling on the collective resources of community groups, businesses, environmental groups, and others, coalitions help the general public understand the full scope of the air quality problem. Pilot sites delivering the initiative through such local coalitions of private and public organizations identified these collaborations as a “best practice.” Coalitions provide a comprehensive base of support that, through a diversity of organizations, can leverage resources and implement the initiative, which is critical for its sustainability at the national and local levels. Through their credibility and combined dissemination channels, coalitions get the message to the broadest audience possible and establish an issue as a national priority.
- **Adaptability of high-quality materials.** Given the variable nature of the transportation-air quality problem, stakeholders expressed the need for a local orientation in identifying and addressing air quality issues. Pilot communities lent their expertise to developing resources and support materials that serve as a foundation for this nationwide community-based public education and partnership effort. One of the most significant results of the pilot and demonstration phases was refinement of the *It All Adds Up* resource toolkit, which communities can use to customize their strategies and tailor the initiative to meet their unique needs.